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ABSTRACT

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) is one of Thailand's two official open universities. STOU has no on-campus classes. Instead, it offers self-instructional packages in a distance education format and conducts optional tutorials in local study centers throughout Thailand. STOU's curriculum, which is designed to provide educational programs to advance Thailand's quality of life and development and preserve its culture, consists of course blocks that are each worth at least six university credits that may in turn be applied toward two-, three-, or four-year bachelor's degree programs or one- or two-year certificate of achievement programs. The optional tutorials, which are taught on weekends by STOU academic staff on a rotating basis, allow students to ask teachers questions about self-study units, receive detailed explanations of topics that are difficult to study independently, and view real-life examples and models. All tutorial teachers adhere to university-prepared guidelines and a standard teaching style. Despite their effectiveness, the tutorials can be improved by offering them in more locations, scheduling them at locations related to their topic, and awarding extra credits for tutorial participation to boost attendance. (Appended are tables and charts detailing STOU's enrollment, administrative structure, and distance education plan.) (MN)

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# VIEWPOINTS ON TUTORIALS IN AN OPEN UNIVERSITY IN THAILAND

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Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and Ramkhamhaeng University are both official state universities of Thailand, which utilize the open system of education. Although no classes are necessary, Ramkhamhaeng University (RU) however still teaches in classrooms for those students who desire to study in this way, but such lectures are not compulsory. Meanwhile, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) has absolutely no classes on campus, but conducts only tutorials in Local Study Centers throughout the country. This paper will therefore concentrate on examining conditions of the tutorials at STOU.

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) was officially established by Royal Charter on 5 September 1978. It is located on 54 acres of land in Tambol Bangpood, Pakkred District, Nonthaburi Province. It was established as a state University in order to provide the people with increased educational opportunities at the university level. It adheres to the principle of life-long education, aims at improving the quality of life of the public in general, seeks to increase the educational qualifications of working people, and strives to expand the educational opportunities for secondary school graduates in response to the needs of individuals and society.

## OBJECTIVES OF STOU

In accordance with the above mission, the university has the following objectives:

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1. To provide educational programs and promote high-level academic and professional courses in order that the people have the chance to increase their level of knowledge in accord with individual and societal needs.

2. To engage in research for the advancement of knowledge and for the country's development.

3. To render public service by disseminating knowledge in order to improve the quality of life of the people in general.

4. To preserve the culture and promote the development of positive attitudes in order to maintain the identity of the Thai nation.

## OPERATION

The University admitted its first group of students in the 1st semester of the academic year 1980-1981, accepting students who were already employed. By the year 1990-1991, ten schools had been opened. They are the School of Educational Studies, the School of Liberal Arts, the School of Management Science, the School of Law, the School of Economics, the School of Health Science, the School of Home Economics,the School of Agricultural Extensions and Cooperatives,the School of Political Science,and the School of Communication Arts. The enrollment was approximately 541,000 students by the year 1981-1988,and graduation was approximately 93,000 or about 17.2 percent of the total number of enrolled students, as detailed in Table 1

## ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

STOU curriculum contents are arranged into self-instructional packages which integrate related material and experience into sets known as course blocks. Each course block is worth at

least six university credits and is divided into 15 units, each of which requires approximately 12 hours of study-time per week.

The University operates on a semester basis with each semester comprising at least 15 weeks. Students must enroll in at least one, but no more than three, course blocks per semester until they have completed the number of course bolcks laid down in the curriculum of the School in which they are studying within a period of no more than 3 times the period of study as laid down in the curriculum.

Three types of courses are taught by the University. They are:

1. Four-year bachelor's degree program.
2. Two and three-year bachelor's degree programs.
3. One and two-year Certificate of Achievement programs.

## EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

STOU employs a system of teaching which enables students to study by themselves without having to enter conventional classrooms. This system of teaching is known as the "Distance Teaching System", and it presents students in different localities with the opportunity to study by themselves in accordance with their individual preparedness, personal convenience and personal interests. Instruction is given through the use of mixed media packets comprised of textbooks, workbooks, cassette tapes, various reading materials, radio and television programs, tutorials, and local practice in Local Study Centers.

## TUTORIALS

Tutorials constitute one of the academic services arranged by the University through the Office of Educational services for the benefit of the students. Through tutorials, academic

staff provide knowledge enrichment, a wider and deeper understanding of the content of course blocks which students study on their own, and clarify problems which students may have with the teaching materials they are studying.

1. Objectives

The objectives of the tutorials are as follows:

1.1 To serve as an academic liaison between students and the University.

1.2 To create a link between tutorials and other teaching materials.

1.3 To assist students in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the academic content of the courses they are studying.

1.4 To understand the problems which students experience while studying by themselves so that approaches and methods of solving them in the future can be worked out.

1.5 To provide students with an opportunity to receive academic guidance and counselling from University personnel.

2. Arrangement

The University has arranged tutorials in the following manner to ensure that they are of the greatest benefit and bring the best results to students:

2.1 Tutorials are conducted on weekends in Local Study Centers throughout the country. They are generally given twice, five hours each time, except in cases where course blocks are divided into three parts or where it is considered by the School of Studies more appropriate to arrange them three times, each time for three hours.

2.2 Academic staff from the University are sent, on a rotation basis, to all Study Centers where they give counselling and guidance to students for 15 to 30 minutes prior to the commencement of tutorials.

3. Advantages

Compared to the teaching methods of other conventional universities, advantages of the STOU tutorials are as follows:

3.1 Teaching is carried out in a family-like atmosphere, as if among relatives,or brothers and sisters rather than teaching by teachers to students.

3.2 Students are able to share their ideas and experiences of life and work among other students in the tutorial class.

3.3 Students are not required to attend the tutorials. The are offered only for students who are interested in a particular course. No mark is given for attending the tutorials in this University.

3.4 Tutorials are a good opportunity for students to ask tutorial teachers and university personnel questions about misunderstandings in subject matter and their studies.

3.5 Teachers are able to explain in much detail content which is rather difficult and complicated for students to study by themselves.

3.6 Teachers can provide real-life examples, models, demonstrations and even field trips to students in tutorials.

3.7 In tutorials, course contents will be grouped together in a theme and illustrated with models or charts.Students can easily understand while they are studying in the tutorial classroom, and they will have the tutorial handout to study at home.

3.8 Tutorial handouts are prepared by the University staff, in order to act as guidelines for teaching in tutorils so that all teachers may employ the same style of teaching. Meanwhile, it also helps the Local Study Centers since there is no need to prepare many audio-visual materials for each tutorial teacher.

4. Obstacles

Obstacles to the tutorials that occured are as follows:

4.1 Some subjects could not be taught in every Local Study Center throughout the country, because few students enrolled in those subjects.

4.2 Few students or no students attended the tutorial classes in some subjects. Comparing the students who attended the tutorials to the number of students registered, it was found that only about 5.45 to 16.98 percent attended, as seen in Table 2.

4.3 An unexpected amount of students entered the classes in some foundation subjects,and the academic staff could not deal with them efficiently. Sufficient numbers of tutorial handouts could not be provided.

4.4 Some students had misunderstandings about tutorial objectives. They thought they would be getting an example of the examination. The did not study the content in the textbooks ahead,so they could not catch up with the tutorial content very well, and had prepared no questions about the course content.

4.5 Different levels of experience of the students in terms of education, field of work, and learning ability made it rather difficult for the academic staff to prepare lessons and to teach.

4.6 Each teacher has to teach subjects covering many topics in a limited time, teaching for about five continuous hours. Therefore,he/she has to rush to explain the content,which makes the tutor feel exhausted afterwards. Because of the limited time, the teacher has to group and condense the contents, pull out only the main idea,give only a few examples, and advise students to read for more detail in a reference source and do more exercises.

4.7 Only a tutorial-handout is provided to students who attend the tutorials, along with the chalkboard as basic media. Only a few teachers use other teaching materials, such as overhead projectors, video-tapes, models or actual examples.

4.8 Many of the problems in the distance teaching system are caused by the students themselves. Students have little time to study or to attend the tutorials,due to their work and family responsibilities. Besides this,the inconvenience in travel to Local Study Centers is another barrier students must confront in their effort to learn.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations for tutorials in distance education are as follows:

5.1 Make clear the objectives and usefulness of tutorials to students through every available channel of communication.

5.2 Inform students about the schedule and subject of tutorials at least a month ahead of time.

5.3 Inform teachers about the schedule and subjects to be taught 1-2 months ahead, so they can be well prepared.

5.4 Adhere strictly to the schedule, as changes only create confusion for the teachers, students, and Local Study Centers.

5.5 Provide sufficients, well-prepared tutorial handouts for teachers and students.

5.6 Arrange a tutorial at a place related to the field of study, such as an Agricultural Experiment Station or Agricultural Extension Office for the School of Agricultural Extensions and Cooperatives.

5.7 Provide real-life examples, demonstrate, and include Field trips to relevant places for effective tutorials.

5.8 Give extra marks for students who attend the tutorial, although this point opposes the philosophy of distance

teaching system:-students study by themselves at home, no classes are required.

5.9 Give extra homework for students to practice in order to increase their skills and experiences, especially in such areas as mathematics and statistics.

These viewpoints on tutorials used in the distance education system of an open university such as Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailsnd, show that tutorials can be very beneficial to students who attend. There are, however, a few obstacles to the success of tutorials of which educational planners should be aware - such as misunderstandings and low student attendance. Increased efforts in public relations and preparation on the part of both the university and the students will serve to make tutorials much more efficient in the near future.

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## APPENDIX

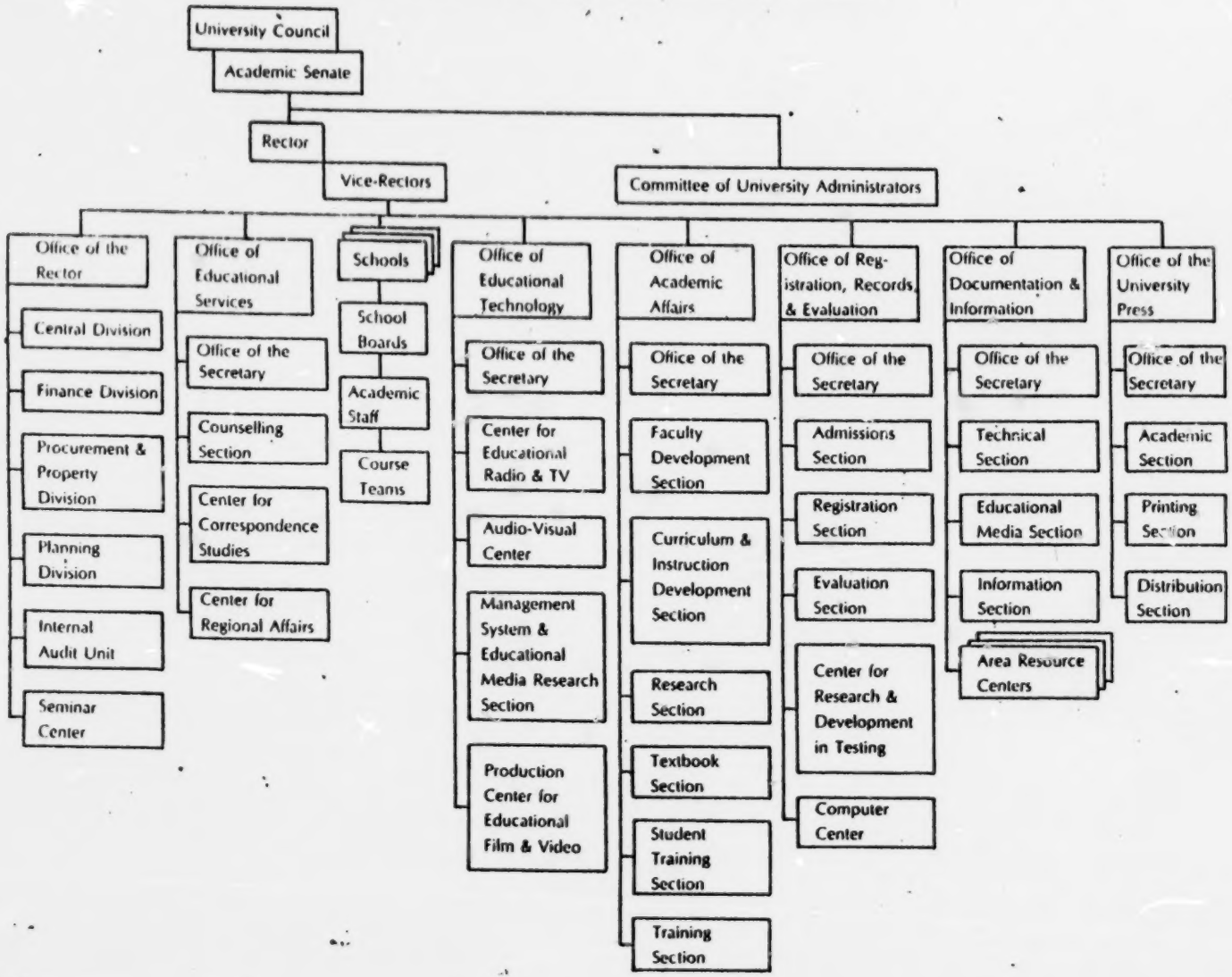
Table 1 Number of enrolled students and graduates from STOU.

| Year | Students | |
|---|---|---|
| | Enrolled | Graduated |
| 1981 | 76,969 | |
| 1982 | 82,139 | 9,594 |
| 1983 | 50,112 | 17,237 |
| 1984 | 85,041 | 11,487 |
| 1985 | 83,422 | 11,770 |
| 1986 | 62,859 | 13,185 |
| 1987 | 49,815 | 15,021 |
| 1988 | 50,748 | 14,812 |
| Total | 541,105 | 93,106 |

Table 2 STOU students who attended tutorials compared with students registered in 1983-1990.

| Academic Year | Students who attended tutorials | Students registered | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1/1982 | 28,231 | 192,835 | 14.64 |
| 2/1982 | 6,840 | 125,505 | 5.45 |
| 1/1983 | 25,931 | 152,715 | 16.98 |
| 2/1983 | 18,122 | 151,903 | 11.93 |
| 1/1984 | 31,525 | 244,537 | 12.89 |
| 2/1984 | 21,670 | 164,980 | 13.13 |
| 1/1985 | 33,385 | 234,207 | 14.26 |
| 2/1985 | 16,066 | 141,581 | 11.35 |
| 1/1986 | 21,080 | 202,232 | 10.42 |
| 2/1986 | 11,427 | 144,654 | 7.90 |
| 1/1987 | 16,171 | 189,316 | 8.54 |
| 2/1987 | 11,376 | 107,273 | 10.60 |
| 1/1988 | 17,894 | 145,465 | 12.54 |
| 2/1988 | 10,718 | 131,710 | 8.14 |
| 1/1989 | 16,711 | 217,329 | 7.69 |
| 2/1989 | 11,325 | 151,527 | 7.47 |

Chart 1 : ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY





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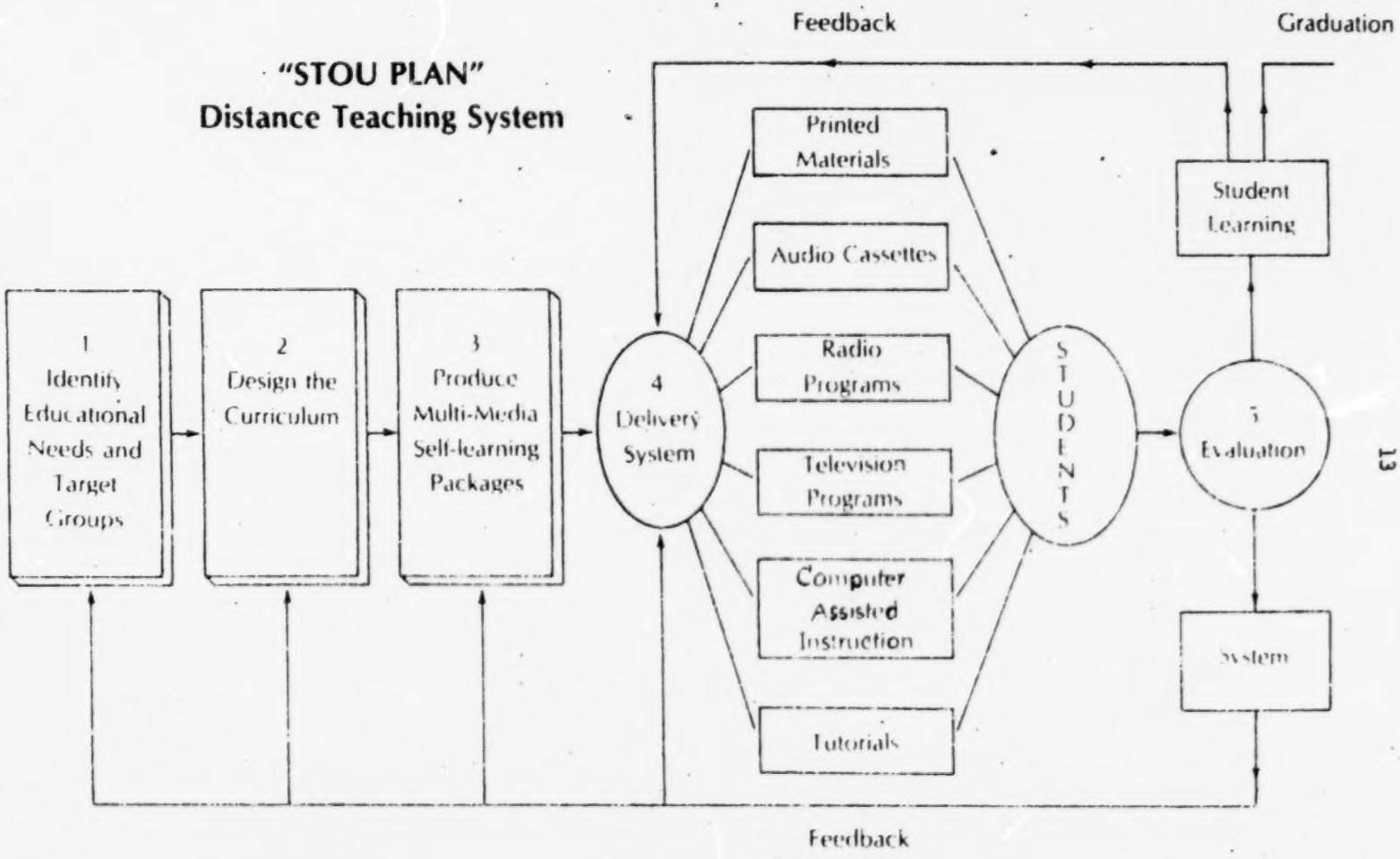
## "STOU PLAN"
## Distance Teaching System





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